

The questions you should be asking

A review of *The Courageous Ask: A Proactive Approach to Prevent the Fall of Christian Non-profit Leaders* (2021) by Brian Kreeger

First a disclaimer, I met Brian at the 2023 Christian Leadership Conference in Chicago in March. Along with another attendee, we shared an enjoyable day together after the conference as tourists, including a cruise on the Chicago River and joining the multitude at the spectacular sculpture Cloud Gate.

I have not mentioned to him that I was going to review his book, though have now sent him a copy of the review. I was interested in Brian's book from the start, primarily from the current wave of more public falls, and also having attended a gathering during the conference hosted by Ministry Watch. This is an organisation that monitors and provides information and advice on Christian organisations.

Brian has written this book from his own experience of a fall, and is making his experience and wider research available now to help others.

It would have been helpful to have this book when starting out in various Christian and church contexts, especially the board context. I will come back to the board, but want to highlight that this book is very relevant for those who may not be in direct leadership themselves. If you are actively involved in a Christian or Church board or governing committee you will find the practical Christian reflections personally helpful. It is also instructive for attentive ordinary members who are prayerfully concerned about the wider witness of Christian leaders, whether they be well-known or locally centred.

While there is an obvious focus on the individual and their own responsibility for their actions, Brian thoughtfully shows the importance of the wider community, and in particular the role of board members pre-fall, during the fall, and the aftermath, including the context of restoration.

Some of the points that stood out for me.

Humility

The theme of humility is set throughout the book and helps to tie together chapters, providing continuity and a foundation that Christians know is central to our understanding of grace.

We can help or hinder Christian leaders in their roles, and placing them on pedestals, even higher than our Lord provides a foundation for pride and a context for a fall. May the Lord place around us loving members who can remind us that our gifts are not created by us and are to be used for the blessing of others.

The Community

A helpful consideration by Brian is the important role the wider community can play in all these matters, particularly in the provision of appropriate support and restoration. Any organisation is not just a board; there are members, clients, and the immediate community where the organisation may be based, and the wider public. All of these parts can play a role in asking questions, helping to prevent a fall, and dealing with the consequences of a fall.

The Board

The Board is a key chapter and the role of board members is an area that organisations are becoming aware of in terms of the need for more and better training.

When you think about many of the quite public falls that Christian leaders have had over many now more public years the immediate focus is of course on the individual. Increasingly what has come out when considering many of these falls is an awareness of a common feature, namely an inadequate board. A board that failed to ask any questions. let alone the right questions.

From my long contact with the Christian Ministry Advancement (in Australia), I have become vitally aware of the importance of governance issues and the importance of a cohesive and functioning board and particularly the need for training. I am not talking about doing ‘get to know each other activities’, but understanding the ministry itself; not assuming that when a person is on the board they will read emails and papers for meetings. Good training will facilitate awareness and understanding of the dynamics and spiritual dimensions of a board and your role in the oversight of the ministry.

And a final focus:

Humility

Yes, I am doubling up. And it is necessary, and a key part of this book that illuminates the context for a fall. While reading I was regularly reminded of a simple and profound saying. *Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall. (Proverbs 16: 18)*

Don’t miss reading the ‘acknowledgements’ that are at the end. Most of us normally skim over these, but they are very relevant and link into the story. Perhaps read these first (along with the highlighted ‘appendix’).

There are a variety of resources associated with the book, and these are particularly helpful for a Board. Brian’s website (briankreeger.com) has more information.

This is an honest and direct book tackling a subject that needs discernment, prayer, and wisdom. May God grant us courage.

Peter Bentley May 2023 (First published on Christian Today June 2023)